



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Family and Youth Services Bureau

FYSB UPDATE

Street Outreach: Youth Development in Action

For more than two decades, the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) and its local grantee youth service agencies have focused on two primary activities: reaching out to youth in difficult situations and promoting a youth development approach to working with all young people. Street outreach and youth development are logical partners as evidenced by discussions at the FYSB and National Network for Youth's "Street Outreach Forum" in January 1998.

Street outreach is inherently a youth development activity. Through street outreach, agencies work directly with young people on the streets to determine what they need and then to provide it. This process is the reverse of many program development models, which produce new programming on the basis of funding streams, political will, or staff ideas.

When street outreach is the core of program development, agencies focus on reducing the barriers that prevent youth from seeking services and allow young people to access services by entering and exiting programs as needed. Streetwork demands such flexibility in the provision of services and the resources necessary to support them. Getting youth to leave the streets requires giving them awareness and understanding of, and access to, the opportunities available to them. It is most frustrating to watch a youth who finally made the decision to seek help being turned away because of lack of bed space or inflexible program entry requirements.

By always keeping the door to services open, staff enable youth to make their own choices, in their own time. Streetworkers help young people to reframe the issues and examine their problems from a new perspec-

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FYSB and National Network for Youth Host Street Outreach Forum

The Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB) and the National Network for Youth cosponsored "Building on Our Strengths: Street Outreach Forum," on January 31, 1998, in Washington, D.C. The forum brought together representatives of the FYSB Street Outreach Program grantee agencies, many of them members of the National Network. The forum focused on such topics as incorporating a youth development approach into street outreach and designing evaluation measures for street outreach efforts.

Marsha Martin, Special Assistant to Donna Shalala, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and

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tive. When youth are ready, staff help them explore the gap between where they are at that time and where they want to be; they then link youth to resources to help bridge that gap. If a young person is not ready to explore those options, staff simply remain available to them until they are. Streetworkers help youth learn to develop solutions to their problems by building on their strengths.

And street youth are incredibly strong. Their creativity and resourcefulness in the face of daunting life circumstances is extraordinary and their ability to survive is remarkable. Sadly, much of their strength comes from being survivors of abuse

or neglect. But, with support, they can use that strength to begin to move their lives in more positive directions.

Street outreach is, in fact, about hope and promise. Young people will choose constructive lifestyles if they are given opportunities and the support of caring adults. It is the job of local agencies and national policymakers to determine how to establish public policy that promotes and supports community efforts to provide youth with those opportunities.

Streetwork, therefore, must be examined within two critical contexts. The first is the context of other public policy reforms

taking place at the Federal level, such as welfare reform. The second and most important context is how this country determines, and then provides, what is necessary for *all* young people.

To examine street outreach within that latter context, it is critical to remember that the target of street outreach is real children who are living on the streets of our Nation. Their images must not be reduced to numbers or used to stimulate or perpetuate citizen fear through sensationalized stories about crime. Instead, people must be reminded that these are children who for a range of reasons have no one, except perhaps each other, to care for them. Their supportive relationships with one another are a testament to the human capacity to love under the most difficult of conditions.

A director of a FYSB-funded agency in Oregon tells the story of a group of street youth who came to him following the death of one of their friends. They asked him to hold a ceremony to mark the passing of this young person. At the ceremony, the youth held candles and shared their thoughts. One 15-year-old girl said, "As we are lighting candles in memory of all the kids who have died, let's not forget the little kid who died in each of us when we came to the streets."

Street Outreach Means...

Accessibility:	Providing young people with access to caring adults who can show youth how to maneuver through systems or redirect their energies in positive ways
Availability:	Being there for young people when and where they need you
Appropriateness:	Conducting street outreach in ways that are culturally, gender, and age appropriate
Alternatives:	Offering youth positive alternatives to street life and giving them firsthand experience with realistic options

The challenge facing youth service agencies is to help others remember and value these children, especially when they come in tough packages or are engaged in less than socially acceptable behaviors. To do so requires focusing the work on behalf of street youth along two parallel tracks: improving practice and public policy. With adequate funding, local agencies can ensure the provision of street outreach services *and* help focus the dialog on how to create communities in which no young people are living on the streets and all have ready access to support, services, and opportunities. ■

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Human Services (DHHS), encouraged forum participants to become involved in local discussions about the implementation of public policy reforms so as to make them work for children, youth, and families.

Della Hughes, Executive Director of the National Network, echoed the importance of partnerships. "When we work together, we can create what is needed for young people," she said.

"FYSB and the National Network are partners in more than this forum," said Pamela A. Johnson, Acting Associate

Commissioner of FYSB. "We are collaborating to move the Federal and national perspective on youth policy from a deficit model to a developmental model that focuses on the strengths of young people, their families, and communities."

This *FYSB Update* provides highlights of the discussions that took place at the Street Outreach Forum and provides tips for hiring outreach staff, preventing burnout, debriefing difficult outreach situations, keeping staff safe, and implementing systems for evaluating street outreach efforts. ■

What Outreach Workers Would Like To Tell Agency Administrators

- Bring outreach workers in from the field on a regular basis to discuss critical issues and to ensure that they feel like part of the team.
- Debrief crisis episodes or dangerous incidents with all outreach staff in a nonblaming manner. Help outreach workers learn from each other's experiences, both positive and negative.
- Ask outreach staff for their input on new or existing services. Remember that they hear the "uncensored" reaction of youth participants to what your agency has to offer.
- Get out in the field often enough to understand the life of your streetworkers, and then sit down and talk with them about your experiences.
- Work with street outreach staff to regularly update agency guidelines and policies that protect streetworkers; help workers set limits that prevent overinvolvement with youth or actions that may put them at risk.

The Street Outreach Forum

Outreach is at the core of every successful community-based youth program. To work effectively, outreach strategies must positively touch the hearts and minds of youth whose lives are overshadowed by abuse, neglect, or limited opportunities. More important, outreach must connect young people to services and programs that can provide them with the skills and nurturing necessary to take advantage of all the opportunities a community has to offer.

Outreach simply is marketing a product. The product is the local youth agency services, and the consumers are young people. Just as manufacturers use marketing to convince people that their product solves a problem or fills a need, youth service agencies rely on the public's perception of how well their program delivers services that help change the lives of young people in their communities. Outreach has a purpose; it is the connection of people to resources. Outreach efforts might include working with the media, conducting educational sessions in schools or community organizations, or distributing informational materials.

Street outreach is a subset of an agency's broader outreach efforts. It is the primary link

between a local program and the communities it serves. In fact, an agency's presence on the streets is critical to building visibility in, and strong relationships with, its community. Those relationships are essential because having a presence on the streets is no longer enough; local agencies must involve youth and communities in designing and delivering services.

Young people can and do play a critical role in street outreach programming. In fact, involving youth in designing, implementing, and evaluating agency programs and services is key to ensuring a youth development approach to streetwork.

Young people can contribute ideas to enhance an agency's approach to conducting street outreach and help to coach outreach workers on places where youth congregate. The following strategies can help solicit young people's input about agency programs and services:

- Initiate informal conversations with youth and be the primary listener.
- Involve youth in designing prevention messages for younger children.
- Invite program graduates to attend staff meetings as "visiting experts." Ask them

how and why they were attracted to the program and what kept them involved.

- Watch and discuss television or music videos with young people. Discuss troubled characters or people facing challenging situations, and ask how they would help them.
- Teach youth how to use a video camera, and then turn them loose to express themselves.
- Create scenarios for youth to role-play, such as giving them 5 minutes to talk to the mayor of the city about whatever they feel is important.

Youth also can assist directly with street outreach, playing a peer counselor role or acting as an assistant to agency staff. Involving youth in actual streetwork, however, requires high levels of support and training. Streetwork can be stressful for even seasoned youth professionals. Youth involved in outreach should be treated the same as staff with regard to rules on maintaining appropriate boundaries and confidentiality. They also should receive similar training but with added components on dealing with peers and the interactive relationship between doing streetwork and

continuing to address their own needs and challenges.

Beyond the need to involve youth and communities, agencies must focus on hiring the right staff, preventing street-worker burnout, keeping staff safe, learning from difficult outreach situations, and continually evaluating and improving street outreach activities. The following are highlights of the Street Outreach Forum participants' recommendations in these areas.

Staffing Street Outreach

Doing streetwork requires an emphasis on hiring and training the right people. Streetworkers generally need the following types of aptitudes and attitudes:

- Creativity and flexibility
- Ability to think on their feet
- "Street smarts" and an understanding of the current street jargon, particularly in the local area
- Good interpersonal skills and the ability to interact well with people from a range of cultures, professions, and age groups
- Familiarity with the operations and services of the local juvenile justice, social

service, health, and educational systems

- Understanding of the dynamics of street youth
- Respect for differences
- Patience and a high tolerance for ambiguity
- Compassion for and comfort with the people and neighborhood served by the hiring program or agency

Hiring Streetworkers

Selecting the right individuals for street outreach work requires a screening process that includes face-to-face interviews and the opportunity to assess people's capabilities for managing critical situations. The interview should enable agency staff to evaluate each candidate's knowledge, attitudes, and ability to think and act quickly. Such an interview process includes a standard question-and-answer period and role-playing. The interview process is a time to adhere to high expectations and to carefully scrutinize each candidate's strengths and weaknesses. The interview questions might include any of the following:

- How does our organizational mission and philosophy (about outreach, providing

youth services, etc.) contrast or compare with your own?

- Why are young people living on the streets in our community, and what might be done to prevent this from happening in the future?
- What does the term "street outreach" mean to you?
- What do you think are the most effective outreach methods?
- What do you think motivates young people to access services or get involved in positive activities?
- How would you describe the positive and challenging aspects of our specific community?
- What are the special needs of our community?
- What do outreach workers need to know about interacting with African-American, Asian, Hispanic, or Native American youth?

If street outreach candidates successfully answer the opening interview questions, the interview team can place them in situations in which the team can measure each candidate's ability to interact with young people, their comfort in the target neighborhood, and their

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ability to think on their feet. The team can ask candidates to role-play difficult situations, such as dealing with a potentially violent disagreement between two youth or a confrontation with staff from another agency that does not appear as flexible in providing services to youth.

As the next step in the interview process, the interview team may set up opportunities to observe final candidates in circumstances close to street outreach workers' daily environment. They might, for example, ask candidates to wait in the agency's drop-in center for their followup interview to see how they informally interact with young people. The team also might send a candidate to meet a few youth in the center and return with specific information about them. Following the interview, the team also can ask the youth for their impressions of the candidates. The interview team might take the final candidates to the target neighborhood and note their reactions or comfort level in that environment.

Preventing Streetworker Burnout

Streetworkers are especially susceptible to burnout because of the unique demands and

realities of the job, which include the following:

- Unusual or long hours
- Awareness of young people's needs and the fact that those needs may extend beyond a program or community's capacity to support or serve youth
- Tendency toward overinvolvement with youth in an effort to rescue them from overwhelmingly painful situations
- Frustration from dealing with bureaucracies
- Constant exposure to poverty, violence, and despair
- Feelings of isolation and even alienation from other staff with whom they may not interact on a regular basis

Helping streetworkers withstand job stress requires strong supervision and support. Agency administrators can best understand the type of supervision and support streetworkers need by periodically spending a day in the field with each worker. Through that experience, supervisors can develop a better understanding of the specific stressors the streetworkers face and what can be reasonably expected of them. Youth agency

administrators also might try the following techniques for supporting streetworkers:

- Provide pre-employment and on-the-job training on outreach techniques, adolescent development and street youth behavior, counseling and interpersonal skills, safety measures, record-keeping, and working with local bureaucracies.
- Provide regular and detailed feedback to streetworkers, and include them in clinical supervision activities.
- Establish an environment in which staff can openly discuss the challenges of streetwork and request support and guidance in dealing with those challenges.
- Create opportunities for streetworkers to spend time together informally to get to know each other; they then can help identify when one of them may be approaching burnout and needs special support, encouragement, or time off.
- Share information with streetworkers on how local systems work, and continually seek to improve collaborations with systems that affect street youth or the workers attempting to help them.

- Cross-train staff so that streetworkers periodically can take a break from the streets and provide support to agency programs or services in another capacity.
- Involve streetworkers in all agency meetings to ensure that they feel a sense of inclusion and involvement in decisionmaking and have the opportunity to raise issues and concerns regarding the street outreach component.
- Model an optimistic, positive attitude about the agency's ability to work with all young people, especially the highly vulnerable, but predictably difficult to reach, street youth.
- Send streetworkers out in pairs, or ask them to check in regularly. Ask local merchants to donate cellular phones that workers can use to stay in touch with the agency.
- Establish a sign-out system that is monitored for extended, unexplained absences.
- Provide extra support and backups when staff are feeling uncomfortable or when there recently has been a crisis in a community. By supporting streetworkers' intuition, supervisors encourage them to trust their instincts, which may protect them in the future.

Keeping Staff Safe

Staff who spend their days working the streets often are at risk themselves. While agency administrators cannot eliminate the innate hazards of outreach work, they can develop policies and procedures that will reduce the risks for streetworkers. These might include the following:

- Provide safety training, including identifying dangerous areas, safe places, and escape routes.
- Help streetworkers develop their own instincts by sharing others' past experiences in the field.
- Hold regular, informal staff discussions about ongoing activities and what is happening on the streets. Help staff learn to identify factors that could predict possible

future problems in a given community.

Debriefing Difficult Outreach Situations

Even the best agency planning and policies will not protect streetworkers against difficult situations from time to time. Some incidents simply require the streetworker to deal with the dynamics of the neighborhood; other encounters are violent and dangerous. Following either type of incident, agency administrators should hold a debriefing meeting that attempts to accomplish the following:

- Establish an environment in which staff can honestly discuss what happened and explore effective methods for dealing with similar situations in the future.
- Focus on what still may be happening in the community as a result of the incident and the implications for staff.
- Respond to the needs of the staff involved.
- Determine when or if the involved worker should return to the community.
- Document the incident, the response, and any resulting changes to policies or procedures.

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- Periodically examine recurring incidents for trends or patterns that might indicate a need to train staff or involve other local agencies in exploring what precipitated such incidents.
- Review and update the organizational procedures for publicly responding to media questions about staff involvement in negative incidents and for dealing in a supportive manner with community reaction to such incidents.

Evaluating Street Outreach

Local youth agencies can implement both informal and formal systems for evaluating street outreach efforts. Through informal evaluation systems, agencies can collect ongoing feedback about outreach activities and individual streetworker performance. Through formal evaluations conducted by an independent evaluator, agencies can effectively assess streetwork process and outcomes.

Informal evaluations can be conducted using the following methods:

- Intake and out-processing procedures: Provide information on how many youth are referred to the program via street outreach, the types of services they received, and the duration of their participation.
- Weekly or monthly contact reports: Provide information on the number and type of contact each outreach worker had with youth from difficult situations, their families, or community members. Agencies can compare the contact reports to the intake reports to begin analyzing which street youth requested services and which did not.
- Daily outreach logs: Provide a daily accounting of each street outreach worker's activities, including ongoing contacts with particular youth and linkages to other agencies.
- Informal interviews with other agencies: Provide feedback about other organizations' perceptions of an agency's street outreach efforts.
- Random field observation visits: Provide supervisors with a firsthand view of how outreach staff interact with young people.
- Weekly street outreach staff meetings: Foster ongoing staff assessment of their outreach efforts and enable them to jointly identify problems and develop solutions.

Formal evaluations can be implemented using the following steps:

1. Select an evaluator:
Choosing the right evaluator is critical to the successful integration of the evaluation process into the agency's overall activities. Look for an evaluator with the following basic skills and attitudes:
 - A baseline understanding of street outreach work
 - Experience evaluating community-based or government-funded youth programs
 - Willingness to work closely with project staff throughout the process
 - Interest in learning more about the agency and its programs
 - Understanding of, and respect for, cultural diversity and the differences in lifestyles caused by poverty and the lack of access to opportunity
 - Ability to answer questions and explain research terminology in practitioners' language

- A desire to stay involved during the process of translating evaluation findings into program improvements
2. Educate the evaluator:
Program staff must be willing to spend time educating the evaluator about the agency's mission, goals, and objectives. The evaluator then can begin the evaluation design process with a clear understanding of the agency and the street outreach component, as well as the relationship of the street outreach component to other program components and its role in contributing to the achievement of the agency's goals. Agency staff also can help the evaluator understand the types of evaluation information that would be most helpful in continuing to enhance programs and services.
 3. Design the evaluation: The first step in the evaluation process is defining the area to be assessed. Together, agency staff and the evaluator can develop a definition of outreach that can be quantified and measured. They then can establish an evaluation framework that includes what will be evaluated, and the evaluation

tools and process. Agency staff should clearly define what they want to learn from the evaluation and how the evaluator can package that information so that it is usable by program staff. It is best to put those expectations in writing to avoid disparity between what program staff and the evaluator are hoping to accomplish through the evaluation.

4. Stay involved in the evaluation process: Agency administrators should involve all outreach staff in determining the types of data to be collected and designing the evaluation instrument and process to be used. They should require that the evaluator meet regularly with program staff to discuss how the process is going, changes in the program or its environment that may cause variations in the evaluation findings, and other preliminary findings.
5. Remain open to the need for change: Evaluations simply are tools for assessing whether an agency or its programs and services are effectively serving youth. Even negative findings can be used to make changes that will improve outcomes

for young people, their families, and the community.

And remember that outreach is the act of engaging youth in new activities, linking them to new people, and transporting them to new places, both literally and figuratively. It is the act of connecting young people to all the promise and possibilities that life has to offer. ■

For more information on street outreach, please call the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY) at (301) 608-8098. The NCFY staff can provide you with abstracts of documents on street outreach and link you to staff of other agencies that are reaching out to young people who are living on the streets. Or use the form on page 11 of this *Update* to share information about your street outreach program ideas. NCFY shares information about the Family and Youth Services Bureau grantee program approaches on its new home page on the Internet's World Wide Web. Send the information by mail, fax, or Internet E-mail to NCFY at the address shown at the bottom of the form.



National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth



The following are just a few of the ways the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY) can assist you:

- Conducting tailored research to meet the needs of your program or community
- Linking you to others who face similar challenges or who have creative ideas about improving youth practice and policy
- Sending you a list of potential sources of funding for youth services in your State

Call today to request copies of the newest NCFY publications:

- *Cómo Apoyar a un Hijo Adolescente: Sugerencias para los Padres* (the Spanish translation of the publication *Supporting your Adolescent: Tips for Parents*)
- *The Exchange*, "A Look at Juvenile Justice in America"
- *FYSB Update: Modeling Partnership: The FYSB and ADD Demonstration Projects for Serving Youth With Developmental Disabilities*
- *Preventing Adolescent Pregnancy: A Youth Development Approach*
- *Resource Development for Youth Service Professionals*
- Spanish translation of the fact sheet *Supporting Youth & Families in Your Community: How You Can Help*
- Spanish translation of *Supporting Youth & Families in Your Community: Student Volunteer Information Sheet*

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Submit Your Agency's Creative Street Outreach Strategies to NCFY



On behalf of the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), the National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY) shares information about the innovative approaches of FYSB grantee programs on its new home page on the Internet's World Wide Web. If you would like to share information on your Street Outreach Program for possible inclusion on the NCFY home page, note it on the form below. Feel free to attach materials that provide additional details about your agency.

Project and Agency Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State/ZIP: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Name/Title of Person Completing the Questionnaire: _____

Approval of Agency Director To Post Information

on the NCFY Home Page: _____

(Name/Signature)

Please describe creative strategies that your agency has implemented through its Street Outreach Program grant. _____

Return this form to NCFY:

- **By fax:** (301) 608-8721
- **By mail:** NCFY, P.O. Box 13505, Silver Spring, MD 20911-3505

National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth

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